

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATERS *Puffinus pacificus* OFF RAS NGOMENI, KENYA

At 10:00 on 26 April 1983, we observed two shearwaters at about 500 m range off Ras Ngomeni (2°58'S, 40°30'E), moving south together with terns *Sterna* spp. (mainly Lesser Crested *S. bengalensis*) into a strong southeast wind before an imminent rain squall. They were dark above, and completely so below, including the underwing, but there were light patches on the upper wing covert area. Flight into wind was faster than that of the terns, with a more purposeful wingbeat, low above the waves with frequent changes of tack and only occasional gliding; the wings were long but were angled like those of a tern. The birds were rather larger in wingspan than Lesser Crested Terns, but judged to be smaller than accompanying Crested Terns *S. bergii*. After some 2-3 min they settled on the sea about 300 m out and were lost to view.

About 30 min later bright sunlight provided excellent viewing of birds offshore from a vantage point on coral cliffs about 10 m high. A large-looking shearwater, presumably one of the original two, took off from the sea about 150 m away and directly out, and flew off steadily south. The following points were noted: the flight was fast with steady wingbeats and no gliding; the wings were quite broad but pointed and well angled at the carpal joint; the tail was quite long, projecting well behind; the upperparts were rich dark brown, but with pale markings on the wing coverts and carpals; the underparts and underwing were all dark sooty brown; the bill appeared to be fine and rather long. We identified this bird as a Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus* and presume that the earlier two birds were of this species. The only other all dark Indian Ocean shearwater of this size with a long and relatively thin bill, the Pale-footed Shearwater *P. carneipes*, has a heavier, stiff-winged flight with much interspersed gliding, narrow wings and a short tail (Tuck 1978, Harrison 1983). Indeed, no other all dark medium sized petrel or shearwater has the same combination of thin bill and long projecting tail.

There are other recent sightings of shearwaters off the Kenya coast which were thought to have been Wedge-tailed, as follows: Watamu, January 1974; Kilifi, December 1977; Ras Ngomeni, October 1980; Shimoni, September 1982. However, the observations described here would seem to represent the first fully substantiated records of this Seychelles breeding species from East Africa.

REFERENCES

- HARRISON, P. 1983. *Seabirds an identification guide*. Beckenham: Croom Helm.
- TUCK, G.S. 1978. *A field guide to the seabirds of Britain and the world*. London: Collins.
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SHOEBILL *Balaeniceps rex* AND WATTLED CRANE *Grus carunculatus*
IN THE MOYOWOSI SWAMP, TANZANIA

In August and September 1971 I flew extensively about the Moyowosi swamp in western Tanzania (4°50'S, 31°24'E). Much of the flying was carried out at very low levels (<10 m above ground) which permitted many birds to be seen and identified. In the course of the flying two species were seen repeatedly. Wattled Cranes *Grus carunculatus* were seen in pairs and small groups of up to

six individuals in a number of locations along the swamp's northwestern edge, particularly where these formed intrusions into the surrounding *Brachystegia* woodland. D. McCallum (pers. comm.), a hunter who knew the area well and who had photographed these cranes in the Moyowosi, confirmed that they had been seen whenever he had visited the area in previous years. There is therefore a suggestion that the species occupies this area permanently.

Shoebills *Balaeniceps rex* were seen frequently over a large area running down the southeastern side of the Moyowosi swamps. Normally this species is somewhat cryptic from the ground, standing still amongst aquatic sedges and reeds. However, the low passage of the aircraft in the immediate vicinity of a Shoebill caused alarm - the bird either crouching with outspread wings or taking flight. Using these reactions I counted all Shoebills within 50 m of my flight paths and was able to produce a crude estimate of densities. This was 0.64 Shoebills/km² of suitable habitat. The extent of suitable habitat was estimated to be of the order of 200 km² and thus the area might have held a population of more than 300 of these birds. While the crudeness of the estimate calls for caution in any use made of it, it does suggest that Brown *et al.* (1982) were unduly pessimistic in their suggestion that the continental population might be as low as 1500. Being familiar with the species on Lake Bangweulu, Zambia, Lake Kioga, Uganda, and along the Albert Nile, also in Uganda, it was not my impression that the Shoebills on the Moyowosi were particularly numerous. An impression of scarcity probably derives from the general inaccessibility of the species' habitat. In the few areas where it can be searched from a boat or from a vehicle, the habitat is usually a thin ribbon along the water's edge. In such circumstances the bird's scarcity is not surprising. Where the habitat is extensive, in the shallows between dry land and papyrus banks, it is difficult to search from either boats or wheeled vehicles.

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THE SWALLOW-TAILED KITE *CHELICHTINIA RIOCOURII* BREEDING
IN THE KEDONG VALLEY, KENYA

In a recent note, Sutton *et al.* (1984) gave brief details of the first confirmed breeding record of the Swallow-tailed Kite *Chelictinia riocourii* in the Kedong valley, some 60 km northwest of Nairobi (1°03'S, 36°25'E), Kenya.

Following a subsequent visit to the nest site on 23 October 1983, further information can be given. As previously noted (Sutton *et al.* 1984), the nest was built in a *Balanites* tree about 3 m above ground level and about 1 m beneath the nest of a Secretary Bird *Sagittarius serpentarius*. Three young Swallow-tailed Kites were seen: two were well able to fly while the third was obviously less advanced.

Based on estimates of the incubation and fledging periods (Brown *et al.* 1982), the eggs must have been laid during the second half of August, when the Secretary Bird was still occupying the nest above. This association with other raptors while nesting is known in this species (Brown *et al.* 1982). The recorded breeding range of the Swallow-tailed Kite is in the northern tropics during the April/May rains (Brown & Britton 1980); these Kedong birds were thus breeding some two to three months later at 1°S, the southern limit of their known breeding range.

As previously noted (Sutton *et al.* 1984), the nest was very white, contrasting with the green of the *Balanites* tree. The young birds' rather mucilag-